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Capital Punishment in Oregon -Statistics

Law Reinstated in Oregon

Oregon reinstated capital punishment in 1984, but the state's first execution in 34 years did not occur until September 6, 1996. At 12:16 a.m., Douglas Franklin Wright died by lethal injection in the execution room at Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem. That event focused an enormous amount of interest, curiosity and attention on the Department of Corrections and how executions are conducted, what its like to live on death row, and the entire issue of capital punishment in Oregon.

Life on Death Row

Once a male offender is convicted of aggravated murder and sentenced to die, he is sent directly to Oregon State Penitentiary. Although no women are sentenced to death in Oregon, their treatment would be comparable. They would be housed, however, at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility until shortly before the execution is scheduled to occur.

Oregon's death row inmates are segregated from the general population, with one inmate to a cell. All death row inmates are classified as maximum custody. Inmates on death row are permitted the same personal property in their cells as are inmates in general population, with the exception of those items that pose a threat to safety or security. For example, no metal items or glass containers may be kept in cells. Items inmates may purchase include televisions and radios (both to be used with headphones). Inmates may purchase items from the canteen (prison store) once per week.

Inmates may not keep a change of clothes in their cells, but rather must exchange clothing items on a one-for-one basis, three times a week.

Inmates are allotted a minimum 40 minutes of inside exercise (including showering and shaving) and 90 minutes of outside exercise per day, a minimum of five days per week. Inmates who choose to forgo outside exercise are limited to the inside exercise period.

Inmates may place collect telephone calls using the inmate telephone system from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., by signing up. Other calls may be allowed as necessary.

Inmates are also provided one half hour of nondenominational religious counseling per week. If an inmate's spiritual needs cannot be met by prison clergy or volunteers, an outside spiritual advisor may be brought in.

Educational materials are provided to inmates upon written request although subject to review. Inmates also work as tier orderlies, in-house painters and yard orderlies. Inmates are allowed reasonable visitations, but all visiting is non-contact and must be scheduled in advance.

Death Row housing rules are articulated by [Oregon Administrative Rules](#) 291-93-005 to 291-93-020.

Execution Policies/Procedures

It is the policy of the Department of Corrections to discharge its statutory responsibility to carry out death sentences while maintaining the safety and security of institutions as well as department staff and their families. Consistent with these policies, executions are conducted in a manner designed to protect the anonymity of department staff and other persons involved. Witnesses to executions agree not to describe, so as to identify, any staff.

Except as provided by statute, no employee of the Department of Corrections shall be required to participate in the execution of an inmate sentenced to death. The department provides professional support for all employees involved in an execution

Receiving a Death Warrant

Commonly 45 days or more
before a specified execution

date, a death warrant is issued by the trial court judge in the county of commitment. The superintendent of Oregon State Penitentiary notifies the director of the Department of Corrections that an execution is scheduled and will take place as soon after midnight as possible on the date specified in the death warrant. The director, in turn, notifies the governor of the impending execution.

The superintendent also notifies the county medical examiner and requests the presence of the examiner or a representative at the execution and that the examiner be prepared to issue a certificate of death. The superintendent is responsible for selecting the executioner, whose identity remains confidential.



The director sends a written order to purchase the lethal substances required for execution, along with a copy of the death warrant, to a drug wholesaler. Supplies and equipment are also assembled and prepared by the superintendent or his designee.

Arrangements will be made to ensure the telephone company has installed two dedicated emergency telephone lines that will ring directly into the execution room. The director will advise the governor and the attorney general of the telephone procedures.

The assistant superintendent of security is responsible for selecting two six-person special security teams (primary and back-up) to assist with the execution. In the weeks leading up to the execution date the assistant superintendent of security and the special security teams conduct drills simulating the movement and restraint of the inmate. They rehearse many scenarios along with medically trained personnel who are responsible for insertion of intravenous catheters and other staff who have assignments in the execution room.

Witness to the Execution

A number of people are invited to witness an execution. These people are specified both in statute (ORS 137.473) and administrative rules (291-024-0020 (3)). They include: one or more physicians, the attorney general, the sheriff and district attorney of the county in which the judgment was rendered and one or more victim relatives. Additionally the inmate may select no more than five friends or relatives and no more than two religious representatives.

Five media representatives are invited to witness the execution: two selected by the Oregon Association of Broadcasters, two selected by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers' Association (one of whom must be from the county in which judgment was rendered), and one representative of the Associated Press. These reporters will act as pool reporters for other media who are assembled in a designated media center on penitentiary grounds.

Other people, including peace officers, may be invited at the discretion of the superintendent.

Witnesses must be at least 18 and pass a security check. They also must be properly attired.

Countdown to Execution

Four Days

No less than four days prior to a scheduled execution date, the condemned inmate is transferred from his cell on death row to a special cell in the Intensive Management Unit (IMU), a separate super-maximum facility within the walls of Oregon State Penitentiary. The execution room cell is adjacent to the 73.5 sq. ft. execution room. Prior to Douglas Franklin Wright's execution the execution room was used as office space. Since 1996 it is used exclusively for executions because of necessary modifications and partitioning.

After transfer to the execution room cell, the condemned inmate is supervised 24-hours a day by a correctional officer, who keeps a log of all activities. All incoming mail is photocopied and the originals placed in storage in order to prevent the inmate receiving drug-infiltrated paper. The inmate is provided telephone privileges with the approval of the superintendent.

The condemned inmate is permitted one hour of exercise per day, so long as it causes no security or

safety risks. The inmate is not permitted contact with any other inmates. He is served the same food as other inmates assigned to the IMU. New institutional clothing is issued to the inmate and is exchanged as needed.

At the discretion of the superintendent there may be daily visits with members of the inmate's family, approved religious representatives, and others who are on the inmate's approved visiting list and requested by the inmate.

Two Days

Forty-eight hours prior to execution, the superintendent ensures that all arrangements have been made for the execution and that sufficient additional correctional officers are scheduled to work the evening prior to the execution.

The superintendent ensures that his/her executive assistant has either prepared or obtained a certificate of death that reflects the cause of death as execution by lethal injection. A form authorizing release of the body, to be signed by the mortician, is also prepared in advance.

One Day

Twenty-four hours prior to execution a medically trained individual prepares and secures the necessary syringes with the lethal solutions, and separately prepares and secures back-up syringes. Secure storage is the responsibility of the assistant superintendent of security.

Penitentiary staff work in concert with the Oregon State Police, the Salem Police and the Marion County Sheriff's office for perimeter security including crowd control, traffic control and penitentiary access. Inmate visiting may be limited or suspended the day before and after an execution.

A media center is set up on penitentiary grounds to accommodate the needs of the media. Only media who have arranged for credentials prior to the execution are admitted to the media center.

The inmate's last meal is personally prepared and served about 6 p.m. by a staff member assigned by the food services manager.

An emergency command center is established in the superintendent's office to manage institutional affairs during the hours preceding and immediately following an execution. The assistant superintendent of Program Services is assigned to manage the command center.

The emergency telephone lines in the Execution Room are checked at 6 p.m. and again at 9 p.m. At 9:30 p.m. they are tested every half-hour until 11:30 p.m. The command center will establish radio contact with the officer-in-charge of the IMU to ensure that messages can be conveyed in the event that institutional or emergency telephone lines become inoperable.

All witnesses and designated media representatives gather in pre-arranged locations at approximately 10 p.m. They remain under staff supervision while on penitentiary grounds. Prior to being escorted to the IMU they are briefed by staff about procedures and what to expect; they are also visited by a counselor who offers information on the psychological effects of witnessing an execution. Security procedures require witnesses to pass through one or more metal detectors. Witnesses may not carry recording devices once they assemble on penitentiary grounds. The only hand-carried items allowed within the penitentiary are note pads and pens or pencils issued by the department.

The Final Minutes

At 11:30 p.m. the assistant superintendent, Security, confirms that the clock used to determine the time to carry out the execution is accurate. The superintendent accompanies the executioner(s) to the execution room and ensures that the confidentiality of the executioner is not compromised.

Once restraints have been applied to the inmate, the Special Security Team leader instructs the officer supervising the execution room cell to open the cell door. The leader supervises the activities of the Special Security Team members, who escort the inmate in security restraints from the cell and position and properly restrain the inmate on the table. There are no visits once the inmate has been moved to the execution room.

Medically trained individuals connect a heart monitor to the inmate which helps determine when death has occurred. They also insert two intravenous catheters -- one primary and one back-up -- in the most appropriate locations on the inmate's body, usually the arms and/or hands.

Following insertion of the intravenous catheters the witnesses are escorted to the witness area. Two



correctional captains are stationed in the witness area to assist witnesses and maintain decorum. If at any point in the execution process a stay of execution is ordered, the superintendent shall halt all execution procedures and the witnesses shall be removed.

The Execution

Immediately prior to execution, the assistant superintendent, Security, inspects all straps, and with the assistance of medically trained staff, makes a final inspection of the intravenous catheters and the injection equipment. Upon authorization from the superintendent the window coverings are lifted so the witnesses can see the inmate in position on the table. The table is designed to slightly elevate the inmate's head so witnesses have full view of the actual execution.

If no stay of execution has been received via the open phone lines to the governor and the attorney general, as soon after midnight as possible, the superintendent signals the executioner to begin injection of lethal solutions into the injection port of the intravenous catheters. As prescribed by ORS 137.473, the lethal solutions include an ultra-short acting barbiturate in combination with a chemical paralytic agent and potassium chloride or other equally effective substances sufficient to cause death.

The executioner signals the superintendent when infusion of the lethal substances has been completed. Once death occurs, the time is noted. The superintendent summons a medical professional to officially certify the inmate's death. The superintendent announces the time of death to the witnesses. The time of death is conveyed via telephone to the communications manager who announces it to the media assembled in the media center.

After the witnesses leave the execution area, they are joined by the superintendent who conveys the inmates last words. Media witnesses are escorted to the media center to share their experiences and impressions with their colleagues as prearranged. Other witnesses are escorted off of penitentiary grounds.

The assistant superintendent, Security, will remain to supervise the removal of the body. The body is released to a funeral home after the body is properly identified using identification photographs for comparison. The State Police are notified when the execution is complete and the body is ready for removal.

The inmate's predesignated contact person will be notified to contact the funeral home to which their inmate's body was taken. This contact person will also receive the inmate's personal property and any amount of money in the inmate's trust account, after deducting any expenses incurred by the department and related to the death of the inmate.

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